1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

small landholders. Three decades ago, the head of one family owned about thirty acres, but after his death the land was divided into smaller plots between his inheritors. At present, apart from two outside landowners who possess about sixty acres in the village, and ten other villagers who each own more than five feddans, all the rest own less than five feddans. If the total arable land, estimated at 1350 acres, were distributed among the total population of 4450 people approximately, the *per capita* share would be little less than third of an acre (seven kirats) or 0·58 crop area *per capita*, which is slightly higher than the crop area *per capita* for the whole country, i.e. 0·46.[1] Moreover, the soil of the cultivable land in the village represents the average soil in the country, judging by its taxable power, which ranges from eighty to a hundred piastres.

At this juncture, it is relevant to mention that according to the Koranic law, at the death of man or woman, his or her property is shared by all the children of the deceased. We cannot go into the various details of the intricate Moslem law of inheritance, but shall refer to some of its significant principles. A female gets a share half that of the male. The inheritance should always be awarded to the 'asaba, the patrilineal line, however distant its members may be (apart from the wife, if she lives after her husband). The law recognizes the equivalence of siblings of the same sex, and it gives no privileges to primogeniture.

During the father's life, his children, whatever their age or status, have no legal right to own any of his property.[2] Whether to divide the land each attending to his share independently, or to keep it intact and farm it co-operatively, depends on the relationship between the heirs.[3] Many factors are involved, such as the existence of half-siblings (brothers or sisters by the father only), where the possibility of division is very great, on the relations of wives and in-laws, on the father's treatment of his children while alive, and so forth. If the land as the symbol of family unity is tilled co-operatively, the married sisters then get their land produce

[1] The 'crop area' unit is used instead of the acre because of the existence of the two systems of irrigation in various parts of the country, and hence the crop area gives a more accurate estimate of the cultivable land. For the whole country it is calculated that the land yields an average of a crop and a half per acre. For the whole country the population is 19,090,000, the cultivated area per acres, 5,585,300, and crop area 8,815,900 (Census 1947).

[2] See S. G. Fitzgerald, *Muhammadan Law*, London, 1931.

[3] The fear of division and perhaps the forgetting of one's name in the family has led some of the landowners to consecrate land, for all the members of his family of the patrilineal descent, which could not be owned separately, and should pass, as left, intact to the second generation and the third and so on. This type of land is called 'Wakf Ahli—family endowment', to differentiate it from Wakf Khairi—charitable endowment, consecrated for religious purposes and looked after by the Ministry of Charitable Endowments. The abuses in running these estates led the new regime that followed the abdication of ex-King Farouk to pass a law dissolving the charitable endowments (September 1952). According to this law these estates are to be distributed among the legal heirs as specified by the Islamic law of inheritance.

1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
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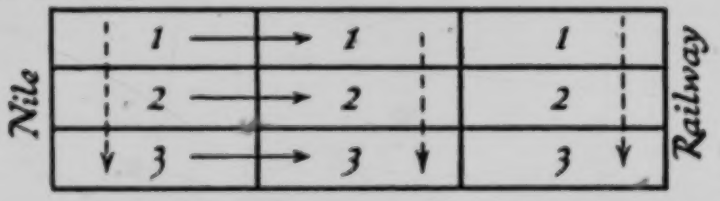
428 according to their share as if they were renting it to their brothers. In cases of friction, the land is parcelled between the heirs, and boundaries are [651] fixed; yet in the tax bill (wird) they are not divided and each has to pay his share of the tax, all being considered 'heirs of so and so'. This was originally a public demonstration of family unity. Lately, the separation of one's own land through official registration has been made an expensive task because of the fees required.

My informant, Mahmoud, told me that 'in these days, more often than [578] not, heirs insist on dividing the land, and this occasions the hottest disputes between brothers, sisters and relatives. Law-suits over land have sometimes cost people the land itself, when they had to mortgage more and more parts of their land to establish their rights over another part. No one "yields a finger" in his share of his father's land; and above all, obstinacy and "the assertion of one's word" complicate the matter. Our life is mostly spent in setting my right and your right—hakki hakkak.'

The actual process of dividing the land is done lengthwise, from 'the sea to the mountain' as the villagers put it. The following diagram shows how it is done:



Suppose the above plot of land is to be divided equally between three brothers; each would receive a narrow plot extending lengthwise, in the direction of the lined arrow, and not breadthwise in the direction of the dotted arrow. The land stretches normally from the Nile to the railway station for more than a mile. It would be understandable that the villagers' [311] division is better when the land varies in its fertility or ease of irrigation along that stretch. But this is always the practice, which involves more work in carrying fertilizer, and in irrigation. It also elongates the boundaries, thus providing more scope for breaking them and inviting trouble. The underlying notion behind this division, according to Mahmoud, is to share in every 'foot and finger' of the land that the father has bequeathed, irrespective of any other considerations, and hence there would be no difficulty in distributing the plots of land among the heirs. Such clinging [425] to every bit of the father's land renders the mutual transference of land, for the sake of convenience, very difficult to achieve.

241 The main crops grown are wheat and barley in winter, and millet in summer. This applies practically to every farmer in the village, as these crops provide the basis of his subsistence. Before the perennial irrigation, one main crop in winter was the general produce, but now these two

162 and below the cataract of Aswan, where the land is less rich
134 and is still under the system of basin irrigation and large, semi-feudal estates. In the province of Aswan there are only 305,195 inhabitants to 224,000 feddans. This gives about 800 to the square mile. But the lowest rural density occurs in the lake region of the North, where the lands are low-lying, salt and marshy. Near Kafr-el-Dawẓr, not far from Alexandria, it is only about 500 to the square mile.

311 This uneven distribution, though it may be explained
162 by physical conditions, is not finally determined by them. In the outlying districts which we have just mentioned the full capacity of the land is far from being reached.

181 There is still another factor of prime importance to
166 be considered — habit. Time as well as place has its influence
464 on human psychology. The fellah has a stable, unadventurous disposition. He stays tied to his native village, which represents for him the security of both past and present. Unlike the Palestinian or Syrian peasant, he never emigrates to try his luck. He will never even take a job in another province where there is a demand for labour, unless he is pressed into it by force. If he does leave his native *balad*, it will not be for another country district, which could never be as good as his own, or afford him a better life or income; he will make for the town, and by preference for Cairo. So migration is comparatively rare, and owners of newly reclaimed land (*barâri*) find great difficulty in securing sufficient hands, despite the good pay and housing they offer.

Rural, gregarious, stay-at-home; such is the Egyptian people in its dominant characteristics. These qualities have contributed as much as the needs and possibilities of the soil to cause the over-population of the country.

162 Over-population, however, is a relative term, and there are a number of factors to be taken into account.

312 The adoption of perennial irrigation has made possible
241 a more intensive exploitation of the most fertile land. Thus the area actually cultivated remained more or less stable between 1930 and 1940 at an average of 5,353,500 feddans; however, since much of this land produced two crops in the course of a year, the crop area, as it is called, rose to close on eight and a half million feddans.

At the same time the use of chemical fertilisers and the improvement of the drainage system raised the average yield per feddan. Between 1932 and 1939 the yield of all crops showed a distinct tendency to rise, only to fall again sharply in 1941, after imports of fertilisers had been drastically cut down.

Again, although the area actually cultivated averaged only 5,353,500 feddans between 1930 and 1940, there are in all 7,100,000 feddans which are classed as cultivable. The surplus of 1,750,000 feddans consists largely, no doubt, of inferior land, but if energetic measures were taken a great deal of it could be worked economically. Even should the limit be reached there still remains the Sudan. This vast and under-populated country is really an extension of Upper Egypt, which it resembles.

If present trends continue, however, these favourable factors are likely soon to be neutralised by the constant increase of the fellah population. Although the birthrate shows a tendency to fall, the gross rate of increase rose from an average of 168,000 a year between 1927 and 1937 to about 250,000 a year between 1937 and 1941.

Year	Population	Increase	Percentage Increase	Mean Annual Percentage Increase
1897	9,714,525	2,910,504	—	—
1907	11,287,359	1,572,834	16,2	1,62
1917	12,750,918	1,463,559	13,0	1,3
1927	14,217,864	1,466,946	11,5	1,25
1937	15.932,694	1,714,830	12,1	1,21

It is clear that sooner or later, if the present standard of living of the fellaheen is to be maintained, let alone raised, the problem of over-population will become acute. The palliatives we have mentioned will not suffice for long. More drastic measures will have to be taken: on the one hand the industrialisation of the country, to create a better balance between industry and agriculture and to raise the general level of production; and on the other hand a policy of re-allotment of land, permitting more intensive cultivation by smallholders, and better distribution of the products. The consideration of such remedies, however, lies beyond the scope of this book.

3: Ayrout M-5 (ca. 1935) 1945
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Egypt MR1

E F 651

It merely presupposes a taxpayer whose financial arrangements are never unsound, and a yield with no great variation.

If then we add to the property tax (about L.E. 5,500,000) the excise from the sale of cotton and the revenue from State domains, the land provides the Government with about L.E. 10,000,000 a year, which represents about a quarter of budget receipts.

The State is also the chief landowner in Egypt. Apart from the estates included in Mohammed Aly's survey, but not bought by the fellaheen, the State acquired in 1878 the property of the Khedivial family, to pay off a part of the vast debts of Ismail Pasha, and has also enlarged its domains by reclaiming new areas in the region of the lakes and on the edges of the desert.

So out of an agricultural area of 7,000,000 feddans the State still holds one fifth, or 1,470,305. It cultivates directly 418,778 feddans, situated mostly in Lower Egypt. This immense untaxed property is in part mortgaged as security for the National Debt, and in part unproductive.

E F 659 311 464

Every year, however, the Government brings under cultivation some 8,000 feddans of land formerly too marshy or too dry, and sells off the greater part of it in small lots to private owners. The State domains give work and a livelihood to about two million fellaheen, as either labourers or tenants. Another million work on land which they will never be able to own.

Wakf Lands

E F 423 794 429

Since the Moslem conquest many landowners have laid all or part of their estates under a sort of entail (*wakf*) (''). This they have done partly for religious motives, but also in order to put their wealth out of the reach of confiscation by princes or dissipation by their heirs. This means that by a kind of religious dedication or donation to God they render their properties perpetually inalienable in law. There are two kinds of *wakf*. The revenues of *wakf khairi*, or charitable trusts, are consigned to mosques, schools, cemeteries, homes or other pious foundations. *Wakfs ahli*, on the other hand, are earmarked for the founder's descendants until the family dies out, when they revert to some religious purpose.

be feared. the village may stand on the level of the fields, barely visible, though always very compact.

A village may be situated anywhere. There is always water near, the soil and the contour of the land scarcely vary, so that the geographer cannot lay down hard and fast rules in explanation. History might have something to say on the subject, but who will ever know the past of those four thousand villages scattered far and wide along the Nile Valley? Their congestion, however, can be explained.

Not a square inch of ground must be wasted, especially if it is rich and well watered. In order to keep the cultivated area as large as possible, the unproductive space covered by human dwellings is reduced to a minimum. As we have seen, up to the nineteenth century the land and its cultivators belonged to the State and a few big landowners. The fellaheen had no interest in living on isolated farmsteads, all the more so because in that troubled period plundering Arabs or highway robbers would soon have despoiled them.

Moreover the village was the official unit for taxes, recruiting, judicial enquiries and the survey, so that it was essential for the villagers to remain within it. For these reasons, which still hold good today, the Government would not allow them to settle outside the village area.

These motives are now reinforced by certain new factors, such as the increase of population, the high price of land, and lack of space. The 1907 survey fixed the boundaries of the village areas once and for all.

A village may contain anything from a few hundred to several thousand inhabitants — 15,000 is not an uncommon figure — but it will always seem no more than one large family. Nothing is more like one Egyptian village than another Egyptian village. Here is another example of the monotonous uniformity which we have so often had cause to mention. There is a difference between the villages of Upper and Lower Egypt, as there is between the fellaheen of the two regions, but the likeness between them is far more striking. If an Egyptian of the older generation is shown photographs of several villages and asked whether they belong to Upper Egypt or the Delta, he will frequently give the wrong answer.

This is because the same kind of people and the same manner of life make for the same sort of villages. When

778 the patron saint of the village, who is called 'Sheikh' or 'Wali' or 'Sidi' So-and-So.

The monument usually stands outside the built-up area, often close to a well or a canal and shaded by trees, which are themselves the objects of veneration. It consists as a rule of a cubical building about twenty feet square, topped by a dome (*qubba*), and whitewashed all over. The sheikh's body does not always lie within. There may be only [782] an empty tomb surrounded by palm branches, candles, shreds of cloth, bits of hair, and harvest offerings. The caretaker of the tomb is maintained by the community, or by the income of a pious foundation (*waqf*). His post is often hereditary.

796 The day of the *mulid*, or anniversary of the holy man, 527 is a great holiday for the villagers. All of them make their way to the holy spot and go through the traditional ceremonies — dances, circuit of the tomb, and incantations (¹⁰).

164 The resting-place of the dead is some distance from the homes of the living. The cemetery is always a piece of waste land, unfit for cultivation, on the débris of an abandoned village (*tell* or *kom*), or on the sand below the cliffs at the desert edge. Sometimes, as at Minia, it lies on the other side of the Nile. The village of the dead is made up of separate tombs packed closely one against the other. They may be rectangular cemented blocks with pillars at head and foot, or simply mounds sprinkled all over with white pebbles or marked by two rough stones or a couple of vertical palm branches which are renewed every year. There are no in- [769] scriptions and no flowers, but every family knows where its dead are buried, and comes to visit them on the first day of the Great Bairam, when the whole village goes off to the cemetery to honour the dead and to feast and make holiday [527] over their tombs. On that day the village is as empty and deserted as it is in October, when everyone has gone out to pick the cotton.

361 It is not yet time for us to go inside the village. In 312 artists' pictures of Egyptian villages there is always a pool 311 to reflect the dull mass of houses with its coronet of trees. 316 In reality this pool is a large greenish pond of stagnant water, as poisonous as it is picturesque. Nearly every village has one, almost out of necessity. To build houses, make bricks, engineer a watercourse or strengthen a dyke, local

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312
material is used, that is to say the nearest available earth. 361
Thus large holes have been created, which have been dug 516
deeper and wider, and have then filled up with water. These
are the *birkas* or village ponds, which serve as drinking- [515
troughs for animals, as swimming-pools for children, and 481]
sometimes as sources of water for the housewife.

The Government has had fifty-odd of these hotbeds of 164
disease filled in, not without meeting opposition from the 657
fellaheen, whose habits and customs have thus been disturbed.
Eighteen such ponds needed 10,000 cubic metres of earth.

Not far from the *birka*, still outside the village, is the 243
gurn, or winnowing and threshing-floor This is a flat 251
patch of ground covered with cow-dung and earth, which has
been levelled and trodden down. Its size is proportionate
to the number of families that use it. The *gurn* is common
property, and nobody can appropriate it. It is big enough
for ten groups to work at a time, until all have winnowed
their corn. It also serves as a public square for meetings,
though often an adjacent piece of waste ground supplements
it for this purpose. Not far away can be seen a great rubbish 364
heap made of dirt, dung and carrion. This heap would over- 744
top the houses, if the dogs and birds of prey did not come
regularly to reduce it, and if the fellaheen did not take manure
from it. It would be an even greater danger to public
health than the *birka*, if the sun did not disinfect it.

Still outside the village, particularly in the Fayum 231
and in Middle Egypt, there may be square towers, as much as 343
thirty feet high, banded in black and white. Their heavy
base, seven yards by four, gives them the appearance of forts,
but they are in fact pigeon-cotes. You can see them assailed,
at sunset, each by a cloud of from fifteen to twenty thousand
pigeons coming back to roost after feeding among the fields.
The construction of these "houses", requiring an outlay of
from L.E. 200 to L.E. 300 each, is a specialised trade. It is
beyond the means of our fellaheen, and can be undertaken
only by an *omda* or big landowner. In the South a pigeon-
cote is often built on a corner of the rooftop, thus raising the
skyline of the village ; but as a rule these houses with pigeon-
cotes, whether built-on or independent, do not form part of
the village itself. They stand apart, and can be distinguished
by their extra storey, their more pretentious appearance,
and their gardens. Such are the owner's villa on an *ezba*, or

Greek, not satisfied with building good houses of red brick and concrete at L.E. 120 each, has arranged for a dentist and a doctor to come every week from the town. He has established a model school, and, best of all, has engaged an assistant for social work. This young Egyptian woman, the first to hold a diploma from the Alexandria School of Social Service, lives not in the owner's villa or the *nâzer's* house but among the fellaheen and close to the school, in a little room which she has fitted up charmingly. At 8 a.m. she opens her dispensary, and at 9 a.m. pays a medical visit to the school. Then she makes a round of the houses, gently discouraging dirt and disorder. She keeps a card-index of each family, and records its progress. She brings the girls together for lessons in child-welfare and sewing, and in the evening assembles the men to tell them stories and teach them how to amuse themselves in their spare time.

At the end of the first year, thanks to the fact that this service was continuous and close at hand, the women of the *'ezba* were washing themselves once a week, though they used only to take a bath once a year. This is because Doreyya did not make speeches to them about bath-tubs and shower-baths, but simply used what every peasant woman has at hand in her home, the *tisht*, the *halla* and the *kûz*.

Then there is the earlier example of a remarkable *ab'adiya* (isolated farm) in the *mârkuz* of Simbellawain. This 400-feddan estate, worked by direct cultivation, has been made by its *nâzer*, an Alsatian of good peasant stock who has been living and working there for twenty-seven years, into a paradise of order and health. The fellaheen are lodged in thirty-six small houses varying in size according to the number of children. They are built of red brick, with wooden roofs. The inside is newly white-washed every year. Nothing is kept on the roof, but each family has an adjoining patch of land, defined by an imaginary line, where dry brushwood and manure are heaped. Nobody encroaches on another's space. The labourers are paid three and a half to four piastres more than on neighbouring estates. They are each allowed one or two feddans for their requirements of maize or berseem, and almost every family owns a donkey and a goat, and either a calf or a *gamoosa*. Once a year everyone receives a new garment at the owner's

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Digging ditches

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Putting the harvested cotton into sacks